

# The ToolBox

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## Mentoring Millennials

### Ready or Not Here They Come!

**T**here has been an ever-increasing level of attention given to the “millennial” generation. These inhabitants of the planet, people born after 1982, are having a significant impact on colleges, universities, the labor market, and the workplace. A generation that was named by an ABC news survey, and defined by the now classic groundbreaking work of Howe and Strauss (2000) in their book *Millennials Rising*, millennials are making their mark in a big way. For example, a review of recent publications indicates a high level of interest in the possible ways that this “new” generation will affect current practices in retail sales, parenting, leadership, broadcasting, fashion, advertising, finances, and corporate management. Additionally, as you might expect, the millennials are also poised to make a dramatic impact on higher education.

Howe and Strauss suggest that this segment of the population, estimated to be 76 million strong in the year 2000, in addition to being amazingly tech savvy, have a unique perspective on their world. They are

- **Optimistic**
- **Cooperative team players**
- **Accepting of authority**
- **Rule followers**
- **The most “watched over” generation in memory**
- **Smarter than most people think**
- **Confident in the future and see themselves as its cutting edge**

For faculty, the challenge becomes one of finding ways to connect, build relationships, and mentor this newest variety of student. In this edition of *The ToolBox*, we will examine the process of mentoring millennial students. and suggest ways of making the mentoring connection.

Howe, N. & Strauss, W. (2000). *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation*. New York: Vintage Books.

### The Parameters of Mentoring

**T**he term “mentor” is often used in a wide variety of contexts but generally refers to a trusted friend, guide, coach, counselor, or teacher. The term’s origin can be traced back to Homer’s *Odyssey*. In the story, the goddess Athena takes on the appearance of an elderly man named Mentor who guides and counsels the young Telemachus (often referred to as a *mentee* or *protégé*) while his father Odysseus is away.

According to Rowley (2006), there are several key competencies common to effective mentors. The following is an adapted form of these competencies relating to the relationship between faculty and students. The effective mentor:

- Demonstrates a commitment to the roles and responsibilities of the mentoring process
- Shows a willingness to accept their protégé as a developing professional
- Takes a reflective stance in regard to interpersonal communications and decisions
- Serves as a coach that provides the protégé with honest feedback, alternative courses of action, and accountability
- Models a commitment to personal and professional growth
- Communicates hope and optimism for the future
- Demonstrates a commitment to ongoing systemic and cultural change that promotes a hope for the future

In addition to these competencies, all of which are critically important, there is also the “chemistry” of the relationship. This is evidenced in the degree to which mentors and their protégés are able to build dynamic relationships that serves as a source of growth and development for both participants. Being a mentor is a powerful way to give—and the return benefits are also an amazing gift.

Rowley, J. B. (2006). *Becoming a High-Performance Mentor: A Guide to Reflection and Action*. Thousands Oaks CA: Corwin Press.



# Five Keys to a Mentoring Connection

## Key #1: Learn their stories and share yours

**L**ook into that sea of eager faces sitting before you in the classroom. There are stories behind each and every face. Likewise, you have a unique story to share. Find ways to have conversations with students that focus on the themes—both common and unique—that can be found in the individual stories of your lives. Telling your story and listening to the stories that others have to share can facilitate the creation of a strong and unique bond. This process also leads to a new dynamic in the classroom. Now as you look out into that “sea of faces” you will also recognize and recall the stories that contribute to making each of those individuals unique.

### Guiding Questions:

1. What part(s) of my story are the most relevant and important to share with a protégé?
2. How does my story connect with the lives of my protégés?

## Key #2: Be available

**T**his is a difficult and yet vital component of effective mentoring. An effective mentor is one that is consistently available to their protégés. This does not mean that you have a 24-hour mentoring hotline, but rather that you make an honest effort to meet with your protégés on a regular basis and respond to their questions and concerns in a timely manner (e.g., in person, by email, text, or telephone responses).

### Guiding Questions:

1. How much time and effort am I devoting to the mentoring process?
2. Are there ways that I can make myself more available to my protégé?

## Key #3: Model what you are teaching and sharing

**A** protégé not only listens to what the mentor says but also pays close attention to what the mentor *does*. As mentors, we must always ask ourselves whether or not we are living out the advice and counsel that we are giving to others. Sometimes we cannot answer the question affirmatively—not because we are deceitful people, but because we may not always be aware of how we are perceived by others.

### Guiding Question:

1. Who do I know that can provide me with some honest, unbiased feedback on the compatibility between my walk and my talk?

## Key #4: Give honest and direct feedback

**P**art of the mentoring process is the difficult task of sharing direct and honest feedback, especially in areas where your protégé can improve performance or do things differently. This is always a challenge. Remember, however, that the relationship with your protégé should be built on trust and the ability to talk honestly about both the good news and the bad news of life.

### Guiding Questions:

1. Am I willing and able to share difficult news and feedback in an honest and straightforward manner?
2. Can I accomplish this task in a way that promotes growth rather than destruction?

## Key #5: Consider mentoring as a journey that you are traveling together

**M**entoring is a journey. We travel along the road with our protégés through a variety of circumstances, opportunities, and challenges. As we travel, we always strive to see growth and change in our protégés. We must always remember that growth and change is also occurring in us as we likewise learn from the relationship and the journey.

### Guiding Questions:

1. What am I learning about myself as a person and as a mentor?
2. How has this experience contributing to my growth as a teacher?

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